

Organizing Quiz Team Competitions

by Shirley Jackson

Teacher and Chair of the English Department

Huntsville High School, Huntsville, Texas

OBJECTIVES

Though quiz team competitions are often viewed as the pursuit of trivial knowledge, they encourage students to achieve academic excellence and increase their awareness of the world around them. Organize a quiz team competition to:

1. test students' accumulation and retention of knowledge in a real life situation.¹
2. encourage independent study and academic excellence.
3. recognize and appreciate non-traditional venues for competition.
4. build self-esteem and school pride.
5. empower students with a new understanding of what has been, what is now, and what can be.²
6. provide opportunities for faculty, students, parents and the community to work together.

METHODS

Depending on the format of your event, the following steps may or may not be sequential:

1. Decide which department will take leadership in sponsoring the activities.
2. Get the support/approval of your administration.
3. Choose a format.
4. Delegate responsibilities and tasks.
5. Select contestants.
6. Choose the subject matter.
7. Decide event specifics: when, where, and how long?

1. The new National Standards for Civics and Government emphasize an active approach to the study of civics and government and are applicable to quiz team competitions. For example, the new standards state that before a citizen can fulfill the continuance of American democracy, he or she must know the purposes and limitations of the Constitution as it was originally drafted. Quiz team questions about the Constitution can facilitate this understanding. See the new standards, Section III.

2. Students who study the past and present role of democratic law in American society are more likely to be able to analyze laws for future use. For example, by thoroughly studying and understanding important historical events regarding the rule of law, such as U.S. Supreme Court Case or Klu Klux Klan attacks, students can evaluate the need to limit the power of the government, and the need for equal protection of civil rights. See the new standards, Section III.

8. Involve parents and the community.
9. Determine regulations and scoring.
10. Prepare teams for the event.
11. Stage the quiz competition.
12. Present awards.

1. Decide which department will take leadership in sponsoring the activities.

Traditionally, activities dealing with history and current events have been left to Social Studies teachers; however, with the emphasis on across-the-curriculum learning, any department can take the lead in sponsoring a quiz bowl. In many ways, the English department may be in the best position to lead the activity—either alone or in cooperation with other faculty members. Within the English department one usually finds the debate team, creative writing courses, and speech classes. Anthologies now contain the writings of a wider variety of multicultural artists dealing with current issues. There is also a renewed emphasis on essays that tie nicely to current events. These are the basis for discussion that address the progress of humanity. What better point of departure for affecting attitudes and behavior in our youth? What better preparation for critical thinking?

2. Get the support/approval of your administration.

Before introducing the idea to students, be sure to get the blessing of school administrators (or district administrators if you plan an inter-school competition). At Huntsville High School, we found overwhelming support—from both students and faculty—for the competition.

3. Choose a format.

Competitions can involve any number of students depending on the resources, amount of time, and facilities available for your competition. The method is the same for each type of competition, but the amount of time and resources needed is proportional to the number of students involved. You may consider a student competition which takes place in several classrooms independently, or you can organize an inter-school competition with regional or district schools. Inter-school competitions encourage school pride and build excellence. Participating schools often reexamine their curriculums to ensure that their students are competitive. Some schools even have pep rallies before important competitions. In Alabama, mock election participants organized an inter-school “Family Feud” competition with election questions. Students loved it and traveled miles on school buses to cheer on the families from their own schools!

Of course, more involved formats require a significant time commitment from participants. Students, teachers, parents, community members, and other participants should be willing to volunteer time to the competition on weeknights or over a weekend. If students and volunteers do not offer their nights and weekends, you will have to choose a format that can be used in the classroom.

At Huntsville High School we have been actively involved in quiz bowls for the past six years and our brightest students are revered as much as our school athletes. Because our students are so interested in this type of competition we began our own in-school competition called “Battle of the Brains.” This is a schoolwide competition of four-member teams that takes place one Saturday each year. One of the many highlights of each event is a competition between the winning team and a team of faculty members.

4. Delegate responsibilities and tasks.

There is no need to feel that you have to do it all yourself, as this type of event emphasizes teamwork. Ask faculty, students, parents, and community members to share the burden of organizing and coordinating the event. Assign different people to various tasks including: securing a buzzer, developing/purchasing competition questions, soliciting local businesses for team T-shirts, and locating equipment (such as podiums, time clocks and microphones).

5. Select contestants.

Ideally, contestants form teams of four members each. This number is small enough to ensure that all members are fully utilized but large enough to facilitate cooperation and a team approach. Teams can be formed in many ways such as self selection, teacher pairing, or classroom competitions. However, teachers should be sure that teams are fairly well-matched so that the quiz team competition is both meaningful and challenging for all.

Choose a date by which teams must formally enter the competition. Consider an information card that must be given to a specific teacher or dropped in a box in a designated area such as the library or principal's office. Publicize the competition and entry deadline through a school publicity campaign, classroom announcements, announcements over the intercom, a notice in the school newspaper, and/or teacher announcements in classes.

If too many teams enter the competition, consider a preliminary competition to determine the teams that will participate in the final quiz competition.

6. Choose the subject matter.

The beauty of the mock election is its versatility. For a truly cross-curriculum competition, consider interweaving many disciplines such as civics, history, journalism, social studies, and geography. Traditionally our faculty and students make-up questions on specific topics with great success, but questions can also be purchased and adapted to a mock election event.³ (See the Resource section at the back of this guide for a list of question providers.)

If you need help with ideas for the subject matter, consider visiting the Mock Election's Internet page (located at www.nationalmockelection.org).

7. Decide event specifics: when, where and how long?

Competitions can be limited to a single day or can extend over several days or weeks, depending on the number of teams competing and the logistics that best meet individual needs. We run at least three competitions simultaneously but in separate locations throughout the school. Other locations might include hotel conference rooms, meeting rooms at the local library, and college or university auditoriums.

8. Involve parents and the community.

School faculty members as well as parents, community leaders, and professors from Sam Houston University act as quiz masters, time keepers, and score keepers. Parents can help find useful research materials, coach participants, go along with the team as a cheering squad, provide transportation and/or refreshments, photograph or videotape participants, or canvass local businesses for help. They could also form teams to scrimmage student teams before the quiz team competition. Partnerships with local businesses can help defray expenditures such as the cost of questions, a buzzer system, awards, team T-shirts, or certificates of participation. (See Chapter 12 of this guide for more information on working with local organizations.)

3. If you purchase questions, you will have to relate them to the purposes of the mock election.

Make your school and community aware of your competition. Place articles in school newspapers, poster school walls, create public service announcements, and contact local newspaper and radio stations. (See Chapter 4.)

9. Determine regulations and scoring.

There are numerous sets of regulations available through your local library. At Huntsville High School, we use the regulations that govern Texas state competitions. This helps our students familiarize themselves with the official rules if they are someday to compete at the state or national level. The standard quiz format calls for four competition quarters, and there is a standard method of scoring each of these quarters. (See *Figures F* and *G* for a sample list of rules and score sheet from the 1995 Sam Houston State University Texas Academic Challenge State Championship.)

10. Prepare teams for the event.

A. HOLD WEEKLY MEETINGS.

Weekly meetings or practice sessions are ideal to help students sharpen their instant recall skills. It is best to simulate the actual competition situation with rapid-fire questions, scrimmaging teams (perhaps a team of teachers might be willing!) and, if available, a buzzer. (See the Resource section at the back of this guide for names of equipment suppliers. If funds are not available, building a buzzer might be a suitable challenge for physics students!)

B. DRAFT PRACTICE QUESTIONS.

Drafting questions helps students learn to anticipate questions and provide answers quickly. Ask each team member to submit 10 practice questions a week.

C. OBSERVE OTHER MATCHES.

Prepare your team for competition by viewing other matches, by scrimmaging against other schools in informal matches, or by tuning into weekly TV or radio contests. “Competing” against recorded TV or radio contests can help students simulate the competition environment.

D. ENCOURAGE TEAM IDENTITY.

Make or purchase matching shirts with your team’s name or logo.

E. RECRUIT SUPPORTERS.

If entering a formal inter-school competition, create a home-court advantage by recruiting a cheering squad to accompany you to the competition.

F. HAVE FUN!

Encourage your team members to enjoy themselves and the competition. In addition to winning the competition, make good sportsmanship one of your goals.

11. Stage the quiz competition.

I have found that a total of 24 student teams (of four members each) is manageable number. A random drawing the morning of the competition determines which teams are paired together. If there are an uneven number of teams, any given team might receive a “by” (or pass) for any given round to allow the competition to continue while accommodating an uneven number of teams.

The competition is single elimination, allowing only the winners to advance. In my experience, a competition structured in this manner lasts approximately 430 minutes.

12. Present awards.

While we are unable to afford scholarships, our “Battle of the Brains” competition awards medals to both the winning team and the runner-up. All other participants receive certificates of participation donated by local businesses.

In whatever capacity one participates in a quiz bowl, he/she is a winner. Preparation and friendly competition encourages excellence in everyone. It has been my experience that competing students pay closer attention in class and read more critically. Students discover things about themselves they did not previously know, and school becomes an active learning process where students enjoy empowerment as well as knowledge.

1995 SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY TEXAS ACADEMIC CHALLENGE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

1. Each contest features two high school teams of four players each.
2. Teams must be accompanied by at least one adult supervisor. The advisor must be a school or school district employee. Although the playing team is not required to be coed, we encourage teams to field mixed teams if at all possible.
3. Points are scored by correct answers to questions having pre-stated values. No points are subtracted for wrong answers.
4. Should an answer be interjected from the audience, the question may be discarded at the official's discretion.
5. Questions requiring a person's name as an answer may be correctly answered by giving the person's surname only, provided there is no other person having the same surname with whom he or she might be confused (e.g., the Roosevelts). If more information is provided than is required for a correct answer and some portion of the information is incorrect, the whole answer will be deemed incorrect.
6. Substitutions are forbidden during the contest, but a team is not required to use the same four players in a subsequent match.
7. If at the end of the match, two teams have the same number of points, the tie is broken in a sudden-death playoff. The first team to answer a question correctly in overtime wins the game. All overtime questions are valued at five points.
8. Appeals regarding answers to questions should be lodged only by the team's advisor, not the players. Appeals may be lodged only at the quarter breaks or at the end of the game before the match is declared official. If a contestant wishes to discuss a protest with his or her advisor, they may work out a hand-signal to arrange a conference at the next break.
9. Decisions of the judges are final. The official declaration of the outcome of the match is irrevocable. A game shall not be replayed, even if the outcome could have been altered by judgment errors.
10. To be an eligible contestant, a student must be rolled in a participating high school at the time of the contest.

FIRST AND FOURTH QUARTER RULES

1. All questions in these two rounds are "Toss Up."
2. Players may interrupt a question while it is being asked if they believe they can anticipate the answer required by the completed question.
3. The player first signaling readiness to answer by activating the electronic response system must wait to be recognized by an official as the eligible respondent. If a player gives an answer before being recognized, the question will be completed for the opposing team.
4. Consultation among team members is prohibited during the First & Fourth quarters. Any appearance of consultation will result in the loss of the opportunity to answer the questions currently being asked.
5. If the recognized player gives an incorrect answer or no answer, the first member of the opposing team to signal readiness may respond after being recognized.
6. If a team answers a question incorrectly before the question is completed, the question will be completed and the opposing team will be given an opportunity to answer.
7. If the quarter-ending tone sounds while the Host is asking question, he or she will stop and the quarter is finished. If the bell sounds during or after a player signals readiness to answer, the player may give the answer to the question—if he or she is correct, the quarter is ended; if wrong, the opposing team is given opportunity to answer and the quarter is ended.
8. The First Quarter is called the "Warm Up Round" and questions are worth 5 and 10 points. The Fourth Quarter is called "Stump the Experts" and questions are valued at 15 and 20 points.

SECOND QUARTER RULES: THE BONUS ROUND

1. There are two kinds of questions in the Bonus Round: Toss Up and Bonus. The quarter starts with a Toss Up question. For each Toss Up question, all of the rules for the First and Fourth Quarters apply.
2. If a team is right on a Toss Up question, it gets a chance at a two-part Bonus question, worth a possible 30 points. The Bonus works this way: the team starts off with a 10 point question, and if they answer correctly they go on to a 20-point question. If the team misses any question at any level, that question and only that question is offered to the opposing team to answer. The Bonus stops there (awarding both team the points accumulated) and a Toss Up question follows. This pattern continues until the end of the round.
3. Consultation among team members is forbidden during Toss Up questions, but permitted and encouraged during Bonus questions. Answers to Bonus questions must be given by the team captain. The team captain does not need to be recognized before answering in the Bonus Round. The electronic response system is not used during Bonus questions.
4. If the quarter-ending tone sounds during a Bonus question, the team is allowed to finish its Bonus attempt (until incorrect) before the quarter expires.

THIRD QUARTER RULES: "SIXTY SECONDS" ROUND

1. The Round begins with the lowest scoring team by selecting one of four categories offered by the Host. They will attempt to answer as many of 10 questions as they can within a 60-second period. If the teams are tied, the team which answered the last question correctly begins the round.
2. Each question is worth 10 points. If any team answers all 10 questions in a set correctly, they are awarded a 20-point bonus.
3. Consultation among team members is allowed during 60 seconds, and all answers must be given by the team captain.
4. The captain need not be recognized by the judge before responding, and the electronic response system is not used except to keep time.
5. The captain may respond before the Host has completed a question, but the Host will complete all questions after a right or wrong answer has been given.
6. After the 60 Seconds has expired, the second team may try to answer any questions the first team missed.
7. After sixty seconds expires, the second team tries to answer the questions missed or passed by the first team. After completing these attempts, the second team will select from the remaining three categories and play the 60 Seconds Round. Then the first team will be given the opportunity to answer the missed questions.
8. IMPORTANT: The team is playing against the 60 Second clock. The Host will give the team an indefinite period of time to answer a question until the 60 seconds expire. If the team does not know the answer, the captain must say "Pass" to move on to the next question. Once a team misses or passes on a question, they cannot later return to it.

SAMPLE SCORE SHEET

Score keepers may wish to pencil an "R" for red or a "G" or green next to each question on the contest question sheets, in order to keep track of which team earned those points.

FIRST QUARTER:	ROUND TOTAL	
RED	(# correct x 10)	
GREEN	(# correct x 10)	
SECOND QUARTER:	ROUND TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
RED (Toss-Ups)		
RED (Bonus)		
GREEN (Toss-Ups)		
GREEN (BONUS)		
THIRD QUARTER:	ROUND TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
RED (standard questions)	(# correct x 10)	
RED (bonuses)	(# sweeps x 20)	
GREEN (standard questions)	(# correct x 10)	
GREEN (bonuses)	(# sweeps x 20)	
FOURTH QUARTER:	ROUND TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
RED	(# correct x 20)	
GREEN	(# correct x 20)	

Figure G